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AUTHOR Ardino, Jo Tagliente
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ABSTRACT

Efficient handwriting plays an important role in strengthening virtually all other school skills. One method of teaching handwriting involves personifying the letters in order to make writing more interesting, meaningful, and fun. The first lesson shows students the correct sitting position and the proper way to hold a pen. The next lesson has the students watching the teacher write small letters on the board, one by one, while they imitate the letters on their paper. After the teacher is satisfied that the students have copied the letters of the alphabet, the teacher demonstrates on the chalkboard the difference between legible and illegible letters and words. This is followed by a story about the letters that relates small letters as children and the capital letters as adults. Then the teacher and students proceed to take each letter, one by one, and personify it. The same is done with capital letters. The object of these lessons is to teach good posture, correct movement, the formation of legible letters, efficient speed, and images of structure so as to guide the correct letter forms. (HOD)

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THE PERSONIFICATION METHOD OF INSTRUCTION IN PENMANSHIP

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Much to my consternation, I have found that many youngsters haven't mastered the art of writing legibly.

Readable handwriting doesn't just happen - it must be taught. Moreover, the only known cure for bad handwriting is more and better teaching of handwriting. Efficient penmanship is a powerful kinesthetic learning device that supports and strengthens practically all other school skills. From the early first-grade reading vocabulary to spelling and the building of general word power, efficient handwriting plays an important role. At all levels of childhood and adulthood the fixing of essential facts and wording effective expressions are greatly enhanced through decipherable penmanship.

Through observation and some research I have found a revived interest in handwriting by parents, employers, teachers, and by many students too. We are now living in an era of increased interest in distinct handwriting, possibly due to a renewed realization that there are two chief ways of communicating in this world - by the spoken word and by the written word. This era was most likely ushered in by newspaper and magazine criticism, which blamed the schools for the millions of dollars

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reportedly lost by commerce every day as a result of illegible handwriting.

Alert teachers have found that when mechanics of handwriting are woefully poor, children become communication cripples. Furthermore, efficiency in many of the various courses of study in school is absolutely dependent upon readable handwriting. Spelling, arithmetic, written English, notes, reports, and organization of ideas in all of the subject areas should be legibly written. Handwriting is the vehicle of expression.

Another reason for increased interest in the mechanics of handwriting is the public-relations value of efficient, easeful writing. David's papers, which he carries home, produce powerful school public-relations effects. Handwriting, good or bad, simply cannot be hidden from parents. When poor handwriting prevails, parents are never happy. Moreover, parents often assume that all other school teachings are on an equally low level. Conversely, when handwriting is pleasing to read, the teacher, the principal, and the other school administrators have powerful public-relations allies in parents.

Consequently, because many teachers profoundly feel that it is very important that children develop skill in handwriting, they affirm that there should be a very definite need to provide specific unique instruction that will help youngsters develop and maintain good handwriting skill. I strongly believe that my

method offers a well-planned developmental program of instruction through personifying the letters in order to make writing more interesting, meaningful, and fun.

My first lesson is showing them the correct sitting position and the proper way to hold a pen. I sit at a desk and I have them watch me first to see how it should be done. Then they all go to their seats and practice while I go around helping those who need assistance.

The next lesson will be watching me writing the small letters on the board, one by one, while they imitate mine on their paper.

After I am satisfied that each one has his or her very own good copy of the letters of the alphabet, I demonstrate on the chalkboard the difference between legible and illegible letters and words. We discuss this and then we talk about the reasons why good handwriting is important. Many good reasons are given by the children and I supply the other reasons which they may have overlooked. By this time, they all realize the importance of good handwriting and the satisfaction and pride each one can get from their well-written work.

When all agree upon the importance of our lesson I tell them a story about the letters. I explain that if we look upon the small letters as children and the capital letters as adults we

are ready to make writing exciting and fun. This new idea captivates their interest; they want to hear more. So - I proceed to take each letter, one by one, and personify it. For example, we'll start with the letter "a." This first letter of the alphabet looks like a little girl who is proud and wants to stand or sit alone on her own chair. The second letter "b" looks like a little boy who is also proud and wants to sit in his very own chair. I continue narrating a story about each letter which I purposely exaggerate in order for them to become enthusiastic about their lesson. If the children say that they look upon a particular letter differently from what I say it is, then I say, "Fine, these letters belong to you when you write them. If you see them as a boy or girl, then you have the right to your own opinion as long as you give them character and dignity." We proceed now with words and they prove their understanding of correct letter spacing by allowing each letter its own space. Occasionally I will purposely write words on the board defying the rules. They immediately correct me by saying that each letter deserves its own space.

We do the same thing with the capital letters, but they're more fun. For example, "A" is austere, "B" is beautiful, "C" is plain, "D" is fancy, "E" is very pretty, etc. Each child will personify each letter as he or she pleases or they will agree, for instance, that "T" is a beautiful woman with an umbrella and that "W" is quite attractive when she takes the time to "primp up," so to speak. If a letter is written crookedly, below the

line, or too close to another, I'll say that the letter looks so old and decrepit that it wants to die. This letter is drowning; bring it up to the surface, or that letter is fussy; it wants to stand alone.

In my method, writing is controlled by the image each child will make of each letter he or she writes. Correct practice will lead toward perfection. I believe that until proper writing habits are established, definite periods should be devoted to cursive writing. Time should be set aside periodically to examine their writing legibility. Children writing at the chalkboard is quite helpful too. They can visualize the proper letter forms, slant, and other qualities more readily by practicing on the board.

The object of these lessons is to teach good posture, correct movement, forming legible letters, efficient speed, images of structure so as to guide the correct letter forms, and to make writing fun through personification.

On a 22 x 28 placard students are reminded by my handwritten declaration:

Your handwriting reveals your character. An expert can tell from your handwriting whether you are impulsive or cautious, cheerful or solemn, practical or artistic, but anyone can tell whether you are careful or careless. Good penmanship not only makes a favorable impression on the reader; it is much easier to read. Look at your papers. Does your handwriting look neat and legible?

This method of teaching writing has brought excellent results and the children agree that writing can be fun!